

A Raisin in the Sun

by Lorraine Hansberry

Directed by Lou Bellamy

Co-produced with

The Cleveland Play House and Arizona Theatre Company

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Preview March 12

TOOLS FOR TEACHING

The following are a series of questions you may use to prompt discussion, critical analysis or dialogue about this play. They may be used either before or after the play, either to guide audiences toward specific issues as they watch or, to stimulate conversation about topical issues afterward.

Penumbra Theatre Company now offers Lesson Plans that use the script, the production, and the study guide to investigate specific themes! Developed by high school teachers and curriculum consultants Kimberly Colbert and Kaye Peters, these questions are intended to meet the state standards for High School Language Arts and Literacy set by the Board of Education. (Grades 9 through 12). Each plan can run from approximately 15 to 45 minutes for discussion. Please contact Penumbra Theatre's Education Director for more details:
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A Guide for Teaching Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*

Overview

This guide provides a broad framework in which teachers may anchor their own classroom practice. For easy reference, lessons have been divided into three strands (literary, thematic, and literary criticism). Teachers may choose to follow one strand for the unit or weave together elements and/or lessons from the various strands. A broad essential question for the entire *A Raisin in the Sun* unit is suggested, as well as more specific essential questions aligned with strands. The essential question provides a foundation for study, with guiding questions for study imbedded in each lesson which will allow for a range of critical thinking and analysis within both English/language arts and social studies content areas. Anchor, or suggested, lessons are provided for each strand along with resource readings and classroom tools we have found effective in our own classrooms.

The suggested lessons are designed to meet high-school level Minnesota Reading and Literature and Writing standards and Minnesota Social Studies standards for Institutions and Traditions in Society. The standards are noted by the possible lessons in boldface type. The numbers and letters refer to the specific standard.

LA – is Language Arts standards
SS – is Social Studies standards.

Vocabulary of Important Terms

Apartheid	was a system of legalized racial segregation enforced by the National Party government of South Africa between 1948 and 1994. Apartheid had its roots in the history of colonization and settlement of southern Africa, with the development of practices and policies of separation along racial lines and domination by European settlers and their descendents. Following the general election of 1948, the National Party set in place its program of Apartheid, with the formalization and expansion of existing policies and practices into a system of institutionalized racism, and incidental Afrikaner domination. Apartheid was dismantled in a series of negotiations from 1990 to 1993, culminating in elections in 1994, the first in South Africa with universal suffrage.
Blackface	is a tradition of minstrelsy in which performers darken their faces, widen their mouths and don tattered clothing in racist imitation of black Americans. Blackface, as a theatrical tradition, was started by white performers but became so widely popular amongst white audiences, that for some time the only work African Americans could get in theatre or film was in blackface.
Civil Rights Movement	(1955–1968) refers to the reform movements in the United States aimed at abolishing racial discrimination against African Americans and restoring suffrage in Southern states.
Color Line, The	Frederick Douglass described what he called a clear social, cultural and political line between white and black people in the US which outlined who had rights and access to resources and kept the country divided.
Confederacy	also known as the Confederate States of America was the government formed by eleven southern states of the United States of America between 1861 and 1865 in response to the push for abolition of slavery within the Union. They elected their own president, Jefferson Davis, and even printed their own currency—both treasonous crimes according to the Union. The capital of the CSA was Richmond, VA where today monuments still stand to honor its legacy. The Confederacy fell after the surrender of Robert E. Lee to Ulysses S. Grant at Fort Sumter in the spring of 1865.
DuBois, W.E.B.	(February 23, 1868 – August 27, 1963) William Edward Burghardt Du Bois was an African American civil rights activist, public intellectual, Pan-Africanist, sociologist, educator, historian, writer, editor, poet, and scholar. The Editor-in-Chief of <i>Crisis</i> and <i>Opportunity</i> , publications circulated by the NAACP, an organization he helped found. Du Bois wrote and published over 4,000 articles, essays and books over the course of the 95-year life. Among his most significant works are <i>The Philadelphia Negro</i> (1899), <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> (1903), <i>John Brown</i> (1909), <i>Black Reconstruction</i> (1935), and <i>Black Folk, Then and Now</i> (1939).

Dunbar, Paul Laurence	(June 27, 1872 – February 9, 1906) was the first African-American poet to garner national critical acclaim. Born in Dayton, Ohio, in 1872, Dunbar penned a large body of dialect poems, standard English poems, essays, novels and short stories before he died at the age of 33. His work often addressed the difficulties encountered by members of his race and the efforts of African-Americans to achieve equality in America. He was praised both by the prominent literary critics of his time and his literary contemporaries.
Feminist Movement	(also known as the Women's Movement or Women's Liberation) is a series of campaigns on issues such as reproductive rights (including abortion), domestic violence, maternity leave, equal pay, sexual harassment, and sexual violence.
Fourteenth Amendment	to the United States Constitution is one of the post-Civil War amendments (also known as the Reconstruction Amendments), first intended to secure rights for former slaves. It includes the Due Process and Equal Protection Clauses, among others. The amendment provides a broad definition of United States citizenship, superseding the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in <i>Dred Scott v. Sandford</i> that had excluded slaves imported from Africa and their descendants. The amendment requires states to provide equal protection under the law to all persons within their jurisdictions and was used in the mid-20th century to dismantle racial segregation in the United States.
Garvey, Marcus	(August 17, 1887 – June 10, 1940) Perhaps best known for his “Back to Africa” movement that encouraged American blacks to abandon the US and the culture of segregation that oppressed them, Marcus Garvey was a journalist, a publisher and an originator of black nationalism and the pan-African movements. Garvey came to the United States from Jamaica and was well-versed in colonial rule. He was the founder of Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and African Communities League (ACL) both organizations geared toward empowering and uniting black people.
Harlem Renaissance	was a flowering of African American art, literature, music and culture in the United States led primarily by African Americans in Harlem New York City. Langston Hughes’ work was seminal to the movement.
Hughes, Langston	(February 1, 1902 – May 22, 1967) One of the Harlem Renaissance’s most celebrated writers, Langston Hughes was a poet, novelist, short story writer and playwright. He also frequently submitted articles for newspapers and journals. Two of his most famous poems are “Harlem” (which inspired Lorraine Hansberry’s <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i>) and “The Negro Speaks of Rivers.” Hughes also wrote Black Nativity, a tribute to the black American gospel tradition. Keenly aware of his voice as representative of an entire race of people, (See “A New Song” in which Hughes writes: “I speak in the name of the black millions. . .”) Hughes concerned himself largely with issues of social justice, representation and racism.

Jim Crow	Jim Crow law was the enforced, at one time legal, separation of the races in the United States based on racial prejudice and assumptions of racial superiority that was contested largely in the public realm as it pertained to people of color accessing social services such as public transportation, public drinking fountains and bathrooms, schools, theaters and stores. Segregation also influenced miscegenation (interracial or interethnic marriage or dating) hiring practices, legal representation, voting practices, medical care and housing. Citizens, business owners, state and federal officials, terrorist mob groups and the KKK enforced segregation. The Civil Rights Movement spurned the US Supreme Court to declare segregation officially unconstitutional in 1954. Its retraction throughout the country proved both slow and very violent.
Johnson, James Weldon	(June 17, 1871–June 26, 1938) was an American author, politician, critic, journalist, poet, anthologist, educator, lawyer, songwriter, early civil rights activist, and prominent figure in the Harlem Renaissance. Johnson is best remembered for his writing, which includes novels, poems, and collections of folklore. Johnson composed the lyrics of "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing." This song would later become to be known - and adopted as such by the NAACP - as the <i>Negro National Anthem</i> . He was also one of the first African-American professors at New York University. Later in life he was a professor of creative literature and writing at Fisk University.
McKay, Claude	(September 15, 1889 – May 22, 1948) was a Jamaican writer, humanist and communist. He was part of the Harlem Renaissance and wrote three novels: <i>Home to Harlem</i> (1928), <i>Banjo</i> (1929), and <i>Banana Bottom</i> (1933). McKay also authored a collection of short stories, <i>Gingertown</i> (1932), and two autobiographical books, <i>A Long Way from Home</i> (1937) and <i>Harlem: Negro Metropolis</i> (1940). His book of poetry, <i>Harlem Shadows</i> (1922) was among the first books published during the Harlem Renaissance. His book of collected poems, <i>Selected Poems</i> (1953), was published posthumously.
Minstrelsy	or the Minstrel Show is a kind of performance that combined music, dance, comedy and storytelling and in America was performed by white actors in blackface. [See blackface , above] Popular especially after the Civil War, minstrelsy relied on racist depictions of black people for the entertainment of white audiences. Minstrelsy was used to reinforce the idea that black Americans were inferior. It celebrated the old plantation South in which black people were enslaved and often served to convince audiences that black people were not worthy of full and equal rights.
Misogynist	one who hates or finds women contemptible. In the late 20th century, feminist theorists proposed misogyny as both a cause and result of patriarchal social structures.

NAACP	Founded in 1909, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was created to provide legal, educational, and infrastructural support to black Americans and black communities within the US. Key aspects of the organization's mission have been the eradication of race, class or caste prejudice in the US, to ensure suffrage (the right to vote) for people of color, to protect their right to fair and balanced trial and legal services, to promote and establish secure systems of education for people of color, and to ensure the right to employment based on ability. Founded by W.E.B. DuBois the NAACP is America's oldest civil rights institution and boasts over a half a million members today.
Oblate Sisters of Providence	are a Roman Catholic order, founded by Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange, OSP, and Rev. James Nicholas Joubert, SS in 1829 for the education of children of color. It has the distinction of being the first Roman Catholic religious order made up of entirely African American women.
Pan-Africanism	is the belief that all people with African ancestry are related to one another in diaspora. The "back to Africa" movement in the United States, led by Marcus Garvey, was built upon the notion that all black people had ancestral roots in Africa and should return to their ancestral homelands. Today, the term refers to an attempt to unify both native Africans and those of the African diaspora, as part of a "global African community."
Patriarchy	The systemic oppression of women by way of exclusion, restriction to resources, objectification, sexual violence, and gender descriptions that privilege and value men over women. It describes a society that is structured around the notion of men as breadwinners, leaders and representatives of the society. This kind of society is marked by the supremacy of the father in the clan or family and the legal dependence of wives and children. Additionally, a patriarchal model traces birth lineage back through the father's bloodlines, which often determines inheritance. In more broad terms, patriarchy describes the control by men of a disproportionately large share of power over the rest of society.
Plessy v. Ferguson	is a landmark United States Supreme Court decision in the jurisprudence of the United States, upholding the constitutionality of racial segregation even in public accommodations (particularly railroads), under the doctrine of "separate but equal."

Red Summer	coined by author James Weldon Johnson, is used to describe the summer and autumn of 1919. Race riots erupted in several cities in both the North and South of the United States. The riots were sparked by postwar tensions of racism, unemployment and inflation. In 1919 it was estimated that 500,000 African Americans had immigrated from the South to the North and Midwest industrial cities for work during the period bookmarked by World War I. During the war, African-American workers filled many jobs left empty by whites who had joined the military, or new ones created by the war mobilization. In some cities, they were hired as strikebreakers, especially during strikes of 1917. This increased resentment among the white working class. Following the war, rapid demobilization and a lack of price controls led to inflation and unemployment. The resulting competition for jobs between whites and blacks was fierce. European-American workers resented the changes that made them feel displaced, including the many new African-Americans added to the rapidly growing cities. According to a period analysis of the events, there were 26 separate riots in communities and cities across the United States where blacks were the victims of physical attacks. The three with the highest number of fatalities happened in Chicago, Washington, D.C. and Elaine, Arkansas.
Restrictive Covenant	is a legal obligation imposed in a deed by the seller upon the buyer of real estate to do or not to do something. Such restrictions frequently "run with the land" and are enforceable on subsequent buyers of the property. Examples might be to maintain a property in a reasonable state of repair, to preserve a sight-line for a neighboring property, not to run a business from a residence, or not to build on certain parts of the property, or to prevent specific populations from moving into the property or area.
Segregation	Segregation, or "Jim Crow law" the enforced, at one time legal, separation of the races in the United States based on racial prejudice and assumptions of racial superiority that was contested largely in the public realm as it pertained to people of color accessing social services such as public transportation, public drinking fountains and bathrooms, schools, theaters and stores. Segregation also influenced miscegenation (interracial or interethnic marriage or dating) hiring practices, legal representation, voting practices, medical care and housing. Citizens, business owners, state and federal officials, terrorist mob groups and the KKK enforced segregation. The Civil Rights Movement spurred the US Supreme Court to declare segregation officially unconstitutional in 1954. Its retraction throughout the country proved both slow and very violent.
Separate Car Act	is a law passed by the Louisiana State Legislature in 1890 which required "equal, but separate" train car accommodations for black and white Americans.
Thirteenth Amendment	Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution officially abolished and continues to prohibit slavery.

Underground Railroad	a network of clandestine routes by which African slaves in the 19 th Century United States attempted to escape to free states, or as far north as Canada, with the aid of abolitionists. Other routes led to Mexico or overseas. It's estimated that at its height between 1810 and 1850, between 30,000 and 100,000 people escaped enslavement via the Underground Railroad, though U.S. Census figures only account for 6,000. The Underground Railroad has captured public imagination as a symbol of freedom, and figures prominently in Black American history.
Washington, Booker T.	(April 5, 1856 – November 14, 1915) was an influential educator, political leader and author working at the turn of the century. He was the founding principal of the Tuskegee Institute. He is perhaps most famous for his autobiography <i>Up From Slavery</i> and his 1895 address in Atlanta wherein he suggested that the best way for African Americans to participate within US society was to redirect efforts to end segregation in order to focus on education and developing a skilled labor force. His debates over this with W.E.B. DuBois, who considered Washington an apologist, are well-known.
Wilson, August	(April 27, 1945—October 2, 2005) was a Pulitzer Prize-winning African American playwright. Called "one of the most important voices in the American theater today" by Mervyn Rothstein in the <i>New York Times</i> , August Wilson's authentic sounding characters have brought a new understanding of the black experience to audiences around the country. For example, <i>Fences</i> , tells the story of a black baseball player who broke national records by leaps and bounds but was prevented from playing outside of the Negro Leagues. <i>Fences</i> opened on Broadway in the spring of 1987 to enormous critical acclaim and earned Wilson his first Pulitzer Prize. Wilson's work gives audiences the opportunity to go back and reexamine American history through characters that are epic, poignant and defiantly struggling against the institutionalized legacy of racism in this country.
Yoruba	a large ethno-linguistic group or ethnic nation in Africa; the majority of them speak the Yorùbá language. The Yoruba constitute approximately 30 percent of Nigeria's total population, and around 40 million individuals throughout the region of West Africa. While the majority of the Yoruba live in southwestern Nigeria, there are also substantial indigenous Yoruba communities in Benin, Ghana and Togo, as well as large diasporic Yoruba communities in Sierra Leone, Brazil, Cuba, Puerto Rico and Trinidad, the Caribbean, and the United States.

Teaching the Play

Unit Essential Question:

Should art educate, inform, organize, influence, incite to action?

(Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*)

Literary Strand Essential Question:

In what specific ways does the dramatic structure of *A Raisin in the Sun* allow us to understand the “truth” of a segregated America?

Theme Strand Essential Question:

The American Dream is rooted in the belief that everyone in America is free to live up to their abilities. How does this ideal shape our dreams and what does the Younger family show us about the American Dream?

Literary Criticism Essential Question:

Is the relation of art to the spectator something that can be diversely interpreted, or, on the contrary, does it rigorously obey certain laws that make art either a purely contemplative phenomenon or a deeply political one? (Boal)

Suggested Summative Assessments for Each Section

1. The **guiding questions** associated with each strand provide good essay questions for a final unit assessment.
2. Students could present a scene from the play with an analysis of the scene and support for their interpretation of the scene and its significance. Presentation could be assessed on how well they supported their interpretation.
3. Research paper on the myths alluded to within the play.
4. Passage analysis.

Literary Strand: Dramatic Structure

Essential Question: In what specific ways does the dramatic structure of *A Raisin in the Sun* allow us to understand the “truth” of a segregated America?

“Realists replied that because they were depicting conditions truthfully, they were acting morally, truth being the highest form of morality.”

Oscar Brockett, *Essential Theatre*

“The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.”

Steven Biko, journalist, South African
Anti-apartheid activist

“Structurally, Lorraine Hansberry remains essentially within the bounds of the conventional realistic well-made play, something almost anachronistic amidst the styles of the 1960s.... The straightforward telling of a story remains a thoroughly honorable literary accomplishment, and Miss Hansberry has practiced this ancient dramatic art with eminent respectability. Moreover, the scene, incident, and dialogue are almost Ibsenesque, avoiding overt stylization for its own sake and performed within the standard box set that progressively becomes more rare.”

C.W.E. Bigsby, *Confrontation and
Commitment: A Study of Contemporary
American Drama*

Lorraine Hansberry has been compared to the likes of playwright Henrik Ibsen, the “founder” of modern realism, and Arthur Miller. Ironically, her work -- written at the height of the Jim Crow era and the onset of the Civil Rights Movement -- employs the dramatic form of the dominant, oppressive culture to deliver the message of “the oppressed.” In other words, Hansberry’s writing allowed her to hold up white society’s own mirror to itself.

In this unit, students will examine the Eurocentric nature of the play’s dramatic structure and how it plays a major role in developing important cultural themes.

Dramatic Structure and “Truth”
Sample Lesson: 4-5 Days

This lesson is designed to follow reading of the play, although the preparatory set could precede study and be reviewed throughout the study.

LA Standards: I B; D1, 13

Guiding Questions:

1. What is significant about the sequence of events in *A Raisin in the Sun*?
2. What is the significance of an African American playwright delivering a message about an oppressed culture to a white audience using a European dramatic form?
3. How does this sequence and form help us to understand what it is like to live in a racist society?

Preparatory Set:

As sequenced below, have students research the following theater vocabulary. This can be done with photocopies of the definitions as they appear in this guide or through other classroom resources. Words can be divided among small groups of students for research and then shared with the class, or individually, depending on teacher and student needs.

Vocabulary: (from C. Hugh Holman’s, *A Handbook to Literature*)

box set: a stage set that realistically represents a room with a ceiling and three walls the “forth wall” being imagined as existing between the audience and the actors.

character: a person in a fictional story

deus ex machina: any device whereby an author solves a difficult situation by a forced invention. (Taken from “god from the machine,” a technique used in ancient Greek theatre. The abrupt but timely appearance of a god. . . used to extricate the mortal characters of the drama.)

mise en scene: the stage setting of a play, including the use of scenery and properties, and the general arrangement of the piece.

plot: a pattern of events

realism: fidelity to actuality in its representation in literature

spectacle: a scene, action, or event that is large, lavish in detail, unusual, or striking, and usually employed as much for its own spectacular effect as for its role in the work.

setting: The physical, and sometimes spiritual, background against which the action of a narrative takes place.

theme: the central or dominating idea in a literary work.

dramatic structure: a set of divisions which represent phases of dramatic conflict

- **exposition:** (or introduction) creates tone, gives the setting, introduces some of the characters and supplies other facts necessary to the understanding of the play.
- **rising action:** (or complication) is set in motion by the “exciting force” and continues through progressive stages of conflict.
- **climax:** a turning point in the action.

- **falling action:** the activity of the forces opposing the hero; the trend of the action [which leads] logically to the disaster with which the tragedy is supposed to close.
- **denouement:** (or catastrophe) a natural outgrowth of the action: a resolution of events.

Materials: paper, markers

Lesson Outline:

1. Set up (Day 2). Divide class into small groups of no more than three. Each group should have a leader (who will facilitate the activity), a recorder (who will write down ideas) and a reporter (who will present group work to the class).
2. Ask students to identify and create a list of significant events in *A Raisin in the Sun*. These events should mirror the elements of dramatic structure (exposition, rising action, etc.) Students should be clear as to why they feel these events are important and should support their ideas with textual evidence from throughout the play. Students should address the guiding questions set out at beginning of lesson as they explore play's plot.
3. Consensus. Once students have completed their lists, instruct each group to come to a consensus on at least five events that represent each element of the dramatic structure of the play.
4. Presentations (Day 3). The teacher should facilitate a round robin reporting session, allowing each group reporter to present their lists as well as their group's rationale as it relates to the guiding questions. After each group report has been presented, help the class reach consensus about which events best represent the play's dramatic structure.
5. Dramatic Structure Visual (Day 4). Divide the class into five groups by pairing two or more of the small groups.
6. Give each of the five groups one poster-sized piece of paper, each marked with one of the five elements of dramatic structure (e.g. exposition). One member of each group should record the agreed-upon event that represents their element, the textual evidence used for support and notes on the effect of the text and structural element in relation to the guiding questions. (For example, if a student said the check was an part of the exposition, they would cite where it appears in the play and explain how it sets up their understanding of the racism depicted in the play and its effect. What is the effect of the check being introduced in the beginning of the play?)

When students have finished with their posters, hang them on the wall for reference.

Quotation Discussion

In four groups, students should discuss the following quotes and answer the associated guiding question. Students should support their answers with textual evidence.

1. **“The Greek word for ‘theater,’ *theatron*, means ‘seeing place,’ and plays performed in the theater engage their audiences largely through visual means. Less than a century ago, live plays could be seen only on the stage; today, most of us see drama in a variety of media; on film and television as well as in the theater.”** (Worthen, 3)

What is the advantage to seeing *A Raisin in the Sun* in person rather than on television or on film? What is the effectiveness of each medium in helping us to understand what it’s like to live in a racist society?

2. **“In fact, the great playwrights of the late nineteenth century – Henrik Ibsen, Anton Chekhov, August Strindberg, and even the young Bernard Shaw – carved a space for themselves as dramatists by writing plays in opposition to the values of their contemporary audiences and to the practice of their contemporary theater – a strategy that would have seemed unimaginable to Aeschylus, Shakespeare, or even Moliere. To bring their plays successfully to the stage, new theaters and new theater practices had to be devised and a new audience had to be found, or made.”** (Worthen, 7)

What is the significance of an African American playwright delivering a message about an oppressed culture to a white audience using a European dramatic form?

3. **“In about 335 BCE, Aristotle’s *Poetics* set down the formal elements of drama, and the influence of Aristotle’s description has been massive: Today we still speak of dramatic form in terms of its plot, characters, language, theme, and its performative elements, what Aristotle called music and spectacle. Any student of drama can profit by thinking about how these formal elements function in a given play.”** (Worthen, 9)

How do these elements of dramatic form work together to help us understand what it was like to be African American in the late 50s/early 60s? What significant themes do these elements develop?

4. **“The literary and theatrical approaches to drama and theater share the assumption that plays are not fully meaningful in themselves; they share the sense that the meaning of drama emerges from the kinds of questions we ask of it, the contexts – literary, historical, theoretical, theatrical – in which we can make it perform, and make it mean something in particular.”** (Worthen, 10)

Record three questions you believe are “asked” by this play. Begin your questions with, “Why might,” and/or “How might.” Once you have composed your questions, exchange them with those of another group. Answer that group’s questions taking care to support your answers with textual evidence.

Final Reflection – Journal

Students should respond to the quote first in writing, and then if there is time, in a large-group discussion.

Consider the quote by Miller about a specific structural element of the play, the *deus ex machina*. How does the placement of the check at the beginning of the play help you to answer the essential question: In what specific ways does the dramatic structure of “*A Raisin in the Sun*” allow us to understand the “truth” of a segregated America?

“If any segment of Hansberry's well-made play technique is open to question it could well be the *deus ex machina* of the \$10,000 insurance check in *A Raisin in the Sun*. . . The situation here, however, is saved by the expedient of setting all the action after the fact, so that to condemn the insurance check is, to all intents and purposes, to condemn the entire play. The insurance money is expected and cannot under any circumstance serve as the sudden reverser of fortune . . . (Miller 165)

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Theme Strand: The American Dream

Essential Question: **The American Dream is rooted in the belief that everyone in America is free to live up to their abilities. How does this ideal shape our dreams and what does the Younger family show us about the American Dream?**

“What then of this new figure (Walter Younger) who appears in American drama in 1958; from what source is he drawn so that, upon inspection, and despite class differences, so much of his encirclement must still remind us of that of Willy Loman (*Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller)? Why, finally, is it possible that when his third-act will is brought to bear, his typicality is capable of a choice which affirms life? After all, Walter Younger is an American more than he is anything else. His ordeal, give or take his personal expression of it, is not extraordinary but intensely familiar like Willy's. The two of them have virtually no values which have not come out of their culture, and to a significant point, no view of the possible solutions to their problems which do not also come out of the self-same culture. Walter can find no peace with that part of society which seems to permit him and no entry into that which has willfully excluded him. He shares with Willy Loman the acute awareness that something is obstructing some abstract progress that he feels he should be making; that something is in the way of his ascendancy. It does not occur to either of them to question the nature of this desired “ascendancy.” Walter accepts, he believes in the “world” as it has been presented to him. When we first meet him, he does not wish to alter it; merely to change his position in it. His mentors and his associates all take the view that the institutions which frustrate him are somehow impeccable, or, at best, “unfortunate.” “Things being as they are,” he must look to himself as the only source of any rewards he may expect. Within himself, he is encouraged to believe, are the only seeds of defeat or victory within the universe. And Walter believes this and when opportunity, haphazard and rooted in death, prevails, he acts.”

-- Lorraine Hansberry, “Willy Loman, Walter Younger and He Who Must Live.”

In the above critical essay Hansberry wrote on *A Raisin in the Sun* in 1959, the year it opened on Broadway, she draws a clear parallel between Walter Lee Younger, arguably the protagonist of her play, and Miller's Willy Loman, another protagonist for whom the American Dream went wrong. She asks whether it is Willy and Walter who have failed or whether they should have asked another question: Is the nature of the dream a flawed one? She also notes the irony that she has chosen, in Walter, to have the disenfranchised African American prevail where Miller's white middle-class male fails and ultimately takes his own life. While Willy looked outward for affirmation and found none, Walter looks inward at the end of the play.

A Raisin in the Sun, now viewed as a classic of American theater, has been depicted as a bellwether of the Civil Rights movement, a study in poverty and self-hatred, and even a feminist play, but its title ties it to Langston Hughes' poem “Harlem” and Hansberry in her essay inextricably ties that dream to the American Dream, a concept specific to American culture and universally understood, if not experienced, among its people regardless of race or ethnicity.

According to the Library of Congress, the term was first used by James Truslow Adams in his book *The Epic of America* which was written in 1931. He states: "The American Dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position," ("American Dreams").

In addition to the American Dream, other possible themes to study are:

- **Pan-Africanism:** What is the significance of Asagai in the Younger household?
- **Feminism:** How do Ruth, Mama and Beneatha represent the plight of women, particularly African-American women in the mid Twentieth Century?

The American Dream and the Younger Family

Sample Lesson: 2-4 days

This lesson is designed to be taught after the play has been read to look at the larger thematic issue of the American Dream. Familiarity with the play's plot and characterization are necessary.

LA Standards: I.C. 4, 5, 7; I.D. 1, 3, 5, 10, 12

SS (Peoples and Cultures) Standards:

- A. Identifying societal concepts that influence the interaction among individuals, groups, and institutions in society.**
- B. Examining tension between individuality and conformity.**

Guiding Questions:

1. What is the American Dream?
2. How does it define us as a country?
3. How does it define the way we see the world and our place in it?
4. Is it achievable for all Americans?
5. How is the American Dream represented in A Raisin in the Sun?
6. What effect do their dreams have on the Younger family?
7. Is the Younger family's experience representative of that of African Americans?
8. Is the American Dream a positive or negative one for Americans and why?

Preparatory Set:

1. Ask students to define the American Dream.
2. Share Adams' definition from above. What do they think?
3. Discuss: How does the dream define the way Americans see the world and their place in it?

Materials:

Paper and writing utensil for each student
Copy of the play

Lesson Outline:

1. Set up: Jigsaw. Student will be divided into four "expert" groups to analyze the dreams of the main characters: Walter, Ruth, Mama and Beneatha. (Asagai could also be included to look at the dream of the immigrant and African to create a fifth group.) Each group will look at one character, addressing the following (write on board or overhead):
 - Define the character's dream.
 - Find three textual examples that develop and support the defined dream.
 - How does the dream fit or differ from the American dream?
 - What obstacles does he or she have in achieving his/her dream?
 - Is the American dream valuable or hurtful to this character?

2. Count off students by four and send to their designated area of the room to address above five bullets. Students should take notes throughout. Optional: Teacher can collect sampling of notes from teaching groups to hold groups accountable. (30 minutes)
3. Students will count off by number in each expert group and re-form into teaching groups by number (all 1s together, all 2s, etc.). In these groups, they will each have five minutes to present their interpretation and supporting text on their character. (The teaching part of the lesson will probably occur on the second day. Allow 25-30 minutes.)
4. Once each member has presented to their new group, ask the students to consider in their groups:
 - What effect do their dreams have on each member of the Younger family?
 - Is their experience representative of the African American experience? Why or why not?
 - Why did Walter Lee refuse Lindner's money? What is the significance of his choice?
5. Students will journal on the final guiding question in preparation for a class discussion: Is the American Dream a positive or negative one for Americans and why? Encourage students to consider effects on other ethnic groups and themselves as well as African Americans.

Reflection:

What does the Younger family show us about the American Dream?
Students will discuss in full class their responses to the journal question, taking notes on discussion. Students may also want to read James Baldwin's essay, included in this packet ("The American Dream and the American Negro") as part of the final discussion and write a final reflection on the essential question after discussion. The question could also provide a final unit assessment.

Works Cited in Theme Strand:

Hansberry, Lorraine. "Willie Loman, Walter Younger and He Who Must Live." *The Village Voice*. Vol. IV. August 24, 1959. 7-8.

Contemporary Literary Criticism. 25 July 2008.
<http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/GLD/hits>.

"American Dreams . . . through the Decades." *The Learning Page*. 25 July 2008.
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/lessons/97/dream/>

Supplementary texts:

Baldwin, James. "The American Dream and the American Negro." *The Price of the Ticket*. New York: St. Martin's, 1985. (attached)

Hughes, Langston. "Harlem." *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes*. (New York: Vintage, 1959); 221.

Literary Criticism – Critical Lenses

Essential Question: Is the relation of art to the spectator something that can be diversely interpreted, or, on the contrary, does it rigorously obey certain laws that make art either a purely contemplative phenomenon or a deeply political one?

—Augusto Boal

The Classical Lens

Classical, or Aristotelian, literary theory begins with Aristotle's *Poetics*, which examines the "objective" features of contemporary Greek epics and drama, says Stephen Cox, professor of humanities at the University of California, San Diego. He adds:

In Aristotelian analysis, the text-making intentions are understood as distinct from social influences and psychological motives. Aristotle appreciated the fact that Greek playwrights derived their themes and stories from the commonly held attitudes and commonly recounted myths of Greek society. He also knew that playwrights might be motivated largely by the desire to win prizes and other forms of public recognition. A psychologist or sociologist might perform an interesting analysis of these background influences on a play – without even beginning to explain and access the choices that its author made to produce the specific effects that he intended. (Cox)

At its root, classical theory deals with literature as a defined art form with rules that are set out in Aristotle's formative work. Literary analysis, then, requires the identification of literary device and its effect. Adherents to classical theory further maintain that Shakespeare and Aeschylus, along with modern playwrights such as Ibsen and Chekhov, are artists who work with intent and one only has to study the literature to figure out that intent. Classical theorists argue that the art form surpasses culture and time period. If *Hamlet* is a piece of the early Renaissance, so goes the argument, then how could it remain relevant to modern audiences?

Postcolonial and Marxist Lenses

On the other end are the more modern theorists who argue that context forms every piece of art through the social influences and values of not just its time but its specific culture. Freud's psychoanalytic theories have been applied to literature and Reader-response theory dictates it is not what the author intended but what the reader/audience interprets that is significant. Marx offered perspective into the literature of dominant and oppressed societies. Even more recently, scholars of postcolonial studies maintain that looking at art through a universal lens causes us to "demote or disregard" key differences of an artist's background that make up the essence of a work.

Economic theories by theorists Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels focus on creating a classless society. Marxist criticism uses the lens of class to examine art and literature.

... All the same, Marxist literary criticism maintains that a writer's social class, and its prevailing 'ideology' (outlook, values, tacit assumptions, half-realised allegiances, etc.) have a major bearing on what is written by a member of that class. So instead of seeing authors as primarily autonomous 'inspired' individuals whose 'genius' and creative imagination enables them to bring forth original and timeless works of art, the Marxist sees them as constantly formed by their social contexts in ways which they themselves

would usually not admit. This is true not just of the *content* of their work but even of *formal* aspects of their writing which might at first seem to have no possible political overtones. (Barry, 158)

Emerging as noteworthy in the 1990s, postcolonial theory provides a lens to look at literature from people who lived under colonial powers until the mid twentieth century. Like Marxist theory, it emphasizes differences and requires a reader to consider contextual elements when forming an interpretation of a work.

One significant effect of post colonial criticism is to further undermine the universalist claims once made on behalf of literature by liberal humanist [aka classic] critics. If we claim that great literature has a timeless and universal significance we thereby demote or disregard cultural, social, regional and national differences in experience and outlook, preferring instead to judge all literature by a single, supposedly 'universal' standard. (Barry, 192)

The following lessons are "intended" to help students be aware of this tension that exists between the intent of the artist, how s/he is influenced by her or his culture and the meaning his or her work may have to an audience.

Literary Theory Through Critical Lenses:
How Do We Know What the Author Intended?
Sample Lesson: 2-4 Days

This lesson is designed to bracket study of the play and provoke students to critically evaluate both the text and their responses to it. It opens up that touchiest of literary questions: Can we know what the author meant?

LA Standards: I.D.1, 4, 7, 14

Guiding Questions:

1. Can we know what an author means when we read literature? How?
2. What forms our interpretation of literature?
3. How can we recognize our own values and biases in how we interpret *A Raisin in the Sun* and how do those affect the validity of our interpretation?
4. How could you recognize Hansberry's intent through the lenses of
 - a) classical literary theory,
 - b) Marxist theory and,
 - c) postcolonial theory?
5. Can you identify cultural and class markers from Hansberry's experiences as an African American woman in the mid twentieth century within the work? What is the effect of those markers on the work? Do they limit it? Do they expand it? How?
6. What makes *A Raisin in the Sun* relevant to audiences in the twenty first century? Try to answer this question by looking at the story through the various critical lenses you have studied.

Preparatory Set:

Three poems provide an interesting opening into a conversation about authorial intent and also an introduction to Hansberry's play: "Harlem" by Langston Hughes, "If We Must Die" by Claude McKay, and "We Wear the Mask" by Paul Laurence Dunbar. You could choose one ("Harlem" carries the line "a raisin in the sun") or use all three.

1. Have students mark up one poem at a time, looking for specific textual markers of the poet's intent. Tell them to write down what they think the poet's message or intent is and be prepared to support it with specific references to the poem.
2. Put students into groups of no more than four (4) and have each group choose a facilitator. Each person will give their interpretation as previously written without interruption in a round-robin format. (If using more than one poem, could split among groups, having two groups do each poem. Have everyone mark up all first.) Explanations of authorial intent must be supported with text and an analysis of how the text supports their interpretation of the author's intent.
3. Students can share out their groups' responses: Did they all agree or not?
4. Check in with groups. If variations or disagreements over interpretation occur, ask: What accounts for the differences in interpretation? Discuss as a class.
5. Have students respond to the following questions in writing:

- What are your dreams? (list 2-3)
 - Do you think you will achieve your dreams?
 - Do you think anyone supports you in your dreams?
 - Do you usually get what you want in life?
 - How do your answers to the above questions possibly affect the way you read the poem?
6. Students should finally reflect on what they discovered about the author's and their role in making meaning of literature. How do they know what the author meant? What kinds of issues (e.g. race, economic status, gender) do they believe influenced the writer(s)?

Keep reflections for reference after study play.

Lesson Outline:

Following the preparatory set, study play with an awareness of how interpretations are formed and the way these interpretations come about through various critical lenses. Ask for students to draw on their studies of Jim Crow and the Civil Rights movement to try to understand the era in which Hansberry wrote. The following lesson may be taught after the play is fully read.

Set up. Hand out six different passages of no more than a page in length (possible passages are attached), numbered 1-6. It would be valuable to strategically hand out the passages to ensure heterogeneous groupings by ethnicity and gender. Students are to mark up the passages, looking for devices (figurative language, allusions or as basic as word choice) that they think develop meaning in the passage or larger play.

1. After mark up (as homework or in class) students should get into the group for the passage they marked up (1-6).
2. Students will discuss the following (place on overhead) in groups, taking notes:
 - a. What is the meaning and significance of the passage to the play?
 - b. What forms your interpretation of the passage?
 - c. Could you recognize Hansberry's intent? How? What is it?
 - d. Can you identify cultural and class markers from Hansberry's experiences in the mid twentieth century within the passage? What is the effect of those markers on the work? Do they limit it? Do they expand it? How?
 - e. How do your own biases or experiences affect your interpretation?
3. As a class, discuss:
 - a. Can we know the author's intent? (Refer to individual group discussions for support.) If not, why not? If so, how?
 - b. What factors affect the way your group members interpreted the passage?
 - c. Is *A Raisin in the Sun* still relevant today? Why? How?
4. Students may summarize their thoughts and discussion in a reflection or essay.

Suggested passages from *A Raisin in the Sun*

#1: Act I, Scene 1

WALTER LEE: [*Straightening up from her and looking off*] You see that? Man say to his woman: I got me a dream. His woman say: Eat your eggs. [*Sadly, but gaining in power*] Man say: I got to take hold of this here world, baby! And a woman will say: Eat your eggs and go to work. [*Passionately now*] Man say: I got to change my life, I'm choking to death, baby! And his woman say – [*In utter anguish as he brings his fists down on his thighs*] Your eggs is getting cold!

RUTH: [*Softly*] Walter, that ain't none of our money.

WALTER: [*Not listening at all or even looking at her*] This morning, I was lookin' in the mirror and thinking about it . . . I been married eleven years and I got a boy who sleeps in the living room – [*Very, very quietly*] and all I got to give him is stories about how rich white people live.

#2: Act I, Scene 1

WALTER: [*Senselessly*] How is school coming?

BENEATHA: [*In the same spirit*] Lovely. Lovely. And you know, biology is the greatest. Yesterday I dissected something that – [*looking up at him as the sarcasm builds to a final sharp thrust*] looked just like you!

WALTER: I just wondered if you've made up your mind and everything.

BENEATHA: [*Gaining in sharpness and impatience*] And what did I answer yesterday morning-and the day before that—?

RUTH: [*From the ironing board, like someone disinterested and old*] Don't be so nasty, Bennie.

BENEATHA: [*Still to her brother*] And the day before that and the day before that!

WALTER: [*Defensively*] I'm interested in you. Something wrong with that? Ain't many girls who decide –

WALTER and BENEATHA: [*In unison*] to be a doctor.

#3: Act I, Scene 2

MAMA: I don't think I never met no African before.

BENEATHA: Well, so me a favor and don't ask him a whole lot of ignorant questions like do they wear clothes—

MAMA: Well, now, I guess if you think we so ignorant 'round here maybe you shouldn't bring your friends here—

BENEATHA: It's just that all anyone seems to know about when it comes to Africa is Tarzan—

MAMA: [*Indignantly*] Why should I know anything about Africa?

BENEATHA: Why do you give money at church for the missionary work?

MAMA: Well, that's to help save people.

BENEATHA: You mean save them from heathenism—

MAMA: [*Innocently*] Yes.

#4: Act I, Scene 3

GEORGE: [*To BENEATHA*] Look honey, we're going to the theatre –we're not going to be *in* it . . . so go change, huh?

[*BENEATHA looks at him and slowly, ceremoniously lifts her hands and pulls off the headdress. Her hair is close-cropped and unstraightened. GEORGE freezes mid-sentence and RUTH's eyes all but fall out of her head.*]

GEORGE: What in the name of –

RUTH: [*Touching BENEATHA's hair*] Girl – you done lost your natural mind? Look at your head!

GEORGE: What have you done to your head – I mean your hair!

BENEATHA: Nothing – except cut it off.

RUTH: Now that's the truth – it's what *aint't* been done to it! Lord, Lord, Lord. You expect this boy to go out with you looking like that?

BENEATHA: [*looking at GEORGE*] That's up to George. If he's ashamed of his heritage –

GEORGE: Oh, don't be so proud of yourself, Bennie – just because you look eccentric. Get dressed.

#5: Act I, Scene 3

RUTH: When we moving?

MAMA: [*Smiling at her*] First of the month.

RUTH: [*Throwing back her head with jubilation*] PRAISE GOD!

MAMA: [*Tentatively, still looking at her son's back turned against her and RUTH*] It's—it's a nice house too. [*She cannot help speaking directly to him. An imploring quality in her voice, her manner, makes her almost like a girl now*] Three bedrooms . . . nice big one for you and Ruth . . . Me and Beneatha still have to share our room, but Travis have one of his own – and – [*With difficulty*] I figures if the – new baby – is a boy, we could get one of them double-decker outfits . . . And there's a yard with a little patch of dirt where I could maybe get to grove me a few flowers. . . And a nice big basement . . .

RUTH: Walter honey, be glad –

MAMA: [*Still to his back, fingering things on the table*] 'Course I don't want to make it sound fancier than it is. It's just a plain little old house –but it's made good and solid and it will be *ours*. Walter Lee – makes a difference in a man when he can walk on floors that belong to him . . .

RUTH: Where is it?

MAMA: [*Frightened at this telling*] Well—well—it's out in Clybourne Park – [*RUTH's radiance fades abruptly, and WALTER finally turns slowly to face his mother with incredulity and hostility*]

RUTH: Where?

MAMA: [*Matter-of-factly*] 406 Clybourne Street, Clybourne Park.

RUTH: Clybourne Park? Mama, there ain't no colored people living in Clybourne Park.

MAMA: [*Almost idiotically*] Well, I guess there's going to be some now.

#6 Act II, Scene 1

MAMA: I've helped do it to you, haven't I, son? Walter, I been wrong.

WALTER: Naw, you ain't never been wrong about nothing, Mama.

MAMA: Listen to me, now. I say I been wrong, son. I been doing to you what the rest of the world been doing to you. [*She stops and he looks up slowly at her and she meets his eyes pleadingly*] Walter – what you ain't never understood is that I ain't got nothing, don't own nothing, ain't never really wanted nothing that wasn't for you. There ain't nothing as precious to me . . . There ain't nothing worth holding on to, money, dreams, nothing else—if it means—if it means it's going to destroy my boy. [*She puts her papers in front of him and he watches her without speaking or moving.*] I paid the man thirty-five hundred dollars down on the house. That leaves sixty-five hundred dollars. Monday morning I want you to take that money and take three thousand dollars and put it in a savings account for Beneatha's medical schooling. The rest you put in a hecking account—with your name on it. And from now on any penny that comes out of it or that go in it is for you to look after. For you to decide. [*She drops her hands a little helplessly*] It's ain't much, but it's all I got in the world and I'm putting in your hands. I'm telling you to be the head of this family from now on like you supposed to be.

WALTER: Mama - [*Stares at the money.*] You trust me like that, Mama?

MAMA: I aint' never stop trusting you. Like I ain't never stop loving you. . . .

TRAVIS: What's the matter, Daddy? You drunk?

WALTER: [*Sweetly, more sweetly than we have ever known him*] No, Daddy ain't drunk. Daddy ain't going to never be drunk again.

#7 Act II, Scene 2

WALTER: [*Looking down at his toes once again*] And my father . . . My father almost beat a man to death once because this man called him a bad name, you know what I mean?

LINDNER: No, I'm afraid I don't—

WALTER: [*Finally straightening up*] Yeah. Well, what I mean to say is that we come from people who had a lot of pride. I mean – we are very proud people. And that's my sister over there and she's going to be a doctor – and we are very proud –

LINDNER: Well – I am sure that is very nice, but –

WALTER: [*Starting to cry and facing the man eye to eye*] What I am telling you is that we called you over here to tell you that we are very proud and that this – Travis, come here. This is my son, who makes the sixth

generation of our family in this country, and that we have all thought about your offer—

LINDNER: [*Holding out the pen, anxious to get the signature and get out*] Well, good . . . good---

WALTER: And we have decided to move into our house – because my father -- my father-- he earned it for us, brick by brick. [*MAMA has her eyes closed and is rocking back and forth as though she were in church, with her head nodding the amen yes*] We don't want to make no trouble for nobody or fight no causes and we will try to be good neighbors. That's all we got to say. [*He looks the man absolutely in the eyes*] We don't want your money. [*He turns and walks away from the man*]

Work Cited for Literary Criticism Strand:

Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. 2nd edition. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002)

Cox, Stephen. "Foundations Study Guide: Literary Theory." *Objectivist Center*.
3 August 2008. <http://www.objectivistcenter.org/showcontent.aspx?ct>.

Poems for Lesson:

Harlem (1959)

by Langston Hughes

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
Like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore--
And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over--
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it *explode*?

If We Must Die (1953)

by Claude McKay

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot.
If we must die, O let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
O kinsmen we must meet the common foe!
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one deathblow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

We Wear the Mask (1895)
by **Paul Laurence Dunbar**

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—
This debt we pay to human guile;

With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be over-wise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?

Nay, let them only see us, while
We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise,
We wear the mask!